

To: Reynolds, Thomas[Reynolds.Thomas@epa.gov]
From: Purchia, Liz
Sent: Wed 8/12/2015 8:16:24 PM
Subject: RE: Can you send me this?

Spill swamps Clean Power Plan rollout -- crisis manager

Jean Chemnick, E&E reporter

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U.S. EPA's accidental spill of mining waste into a Colorado river is stealing the spotlight the agency had reserved for its Clean Power Plan rollout.

The incident hijacked a Washington, D.C., press conference yesterday meant to be focused on the power rules, where EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy faced questions only on the spill. And today she traveled to Colorado and New Mexico to view its effects.

Asked when McCarthy's promotion of the Clean Power Plan would resume, an agency spokeswoman said: "We don't have details to share at this time. Our focus is on the Gold King mine response."

While the two events are in no way connected, the release of 3 million gallons of wastewater containing arsenic and other contaminants into rivers out West won't help EPA sell its power rules to fresh audiences, said Ernest DelBuono, who heads the crisis communications practice at the PR firm LEVICK in D.C.

"Any organization that's looking to persuade people to come to their way of thinking, this doesn't help them, it doesn't give people more confidence in what they're doing," he said. "How can they talk about clean air when they're cleaning up a spill that they caused?"

He added, "No matter how hard they may try to pivot back to the clean air message while this spill is going on and the cleanup is going on, it's almost impossible for them to do that in any public forum."

There is an opportunity cost associated with spending this time -- the week after release of the power rules -- on another topic, DelBuono said. The agency would have preferred to focus on the time drumming up support for the rules, which President Obama will tout at a clean energy conference in Nevada later this month and then during a visit to the Alaskan Arctic.

But DelBuono said the event was unlikely to change any minds among the rule's chief supporters or detractors. The latter would cite the event as further proof of EPA's incompetence, while the former would excuse it as an accident that has no relation to EPA's other work.

An energy lobbyist said in an email last night that the accident seemed to have cut into EPA's "Clean Power Plan victory lap around the country."

"One day you're saving the environment, the next day destroying it," he quipped.

But Daniel Weiss of the League of Conservation Voters dismissed the idea that discussion of the spill and the rule belonged in the same story. The spill was a result of efforts to clean up toxic substances left by a private mining firm, he noted.

"To the extent that the public is paying attention at all, seeing this horrible spill will have little impact on public

support for the Clean Power Plan," he said. Asked whether it will cast doubt on the agency's credibility even though the events are not connected, Weiss said, "I don't think that's how people think."

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